FEMINIST VOICES IN DALIT LITERATURE: THE STUDY OF SELECT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

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Researcher

More Roshankumar Vitthalrao

M.A. English, NET, CTE

Research Supervisor

Dr. Shailaja B. Wadikar

Professor of English

School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies

S.R.T.M. University, Nanded-431606.

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Introduction:

An autobiography is a self-written account of the life of oneself. The word "autobiography" was first used deprecatingly by William Taylor in 1797 in the English periodical *The Monthly Review*, when he suggested the word as hybrid, but condemned it as 'pedantic'. However, its next recorded use was in its present sense by Robert Southey in 1809. In his book, *Inside Out*, E. Stuart Bates offers a functional definition of autobiography as "a narrative of past of a person by the person concerned". Despite only being named early in the nineteenth century, first-person autobiographical writing originates in antiquity. Roy Pascal differentiates autobiography from the periodic self-reflective mode of journal or diary writing by noting that "an autobiography is a review of a life from particular moment in time, while the diary, however reflective it may be, moves through a series of moments in time". Autobiographer thus takes stock of the autobiographer's life from the moment of composition. While biographers generally rely on a wide variety of documents of viewpoint, autobiography may be based entirely on the writer's memory. The memoir form is closely associated with autobiography but it tends, as Pascal claims, to focus less on the self and more on others during the autobiographer's review of his or her life.

There are but few and scattered examples of autobiographical literature in antiquity and the Middle Ages. It may be stretching a point to include, from the 1st century BCE, the letters of Cicero and Julius Caesar's commentaries tell little about Caesar, though they present a masterly picture of the conquest of Gaul and the operations of the Roman Military machine at its most efficient. But saint Augustine's Confessions, written about 400 CE, stands out as unique : though Augustine put Christianity at the centre of his narrative and considered his narrative and his description of his own life to be merely incidental, he produced a powerful personal account, stretching from youth to adulthood of his religious conversion. One of the first great autobiographies of the Renaissance is that of the sculptor and goldsmith Benvenuto Cellini written between 1556 and 1558, and entitled by him simply Vista. Possibly the first publicly

available autobiography written in English was Captain John Smith's autobiography published in 1630. Following the trend of Romanticism which greatly emphasized the role and nature of the individual and in the footsteps of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Confessions, a more intimate from autobiography, exploring the subjects and emotion came into fashion. We can say, autobiography is a form of introspection. When authors write about their past, it is not free from emotions. Revealing character's intentions, thoughts and emotions is another way that the narrator evaluates why events occurred as they did. By explaining what happened in the past, the author is able to express to the reader how the self evolved. The self now is the person he or she is because of the events of the past.

Caste system, a descent-based institutionalized inequality, has been practiced for thousands of years in parts of India. Caste remains a cage for Dalit communities, spreading its tentacles wide and deep. Over the centuries caste has made its presence in the lives of people through religious privileges and prohibitions, descent-based differential socio-economic status and opportunities, power to make both social and personal decisions and violence against those who challenging the caste system. It exists in every sphere of life from pattern of housing food and dinning, rights over water, land and cattle, marriage, choice of occupation to modern day institutions. In India, despite the constitutional provisions and legislations to safeguard the right and lives of Dalit, caste has persisted and persisted and transformed itself into a myriad of new forms. It remains a challenge to the ideals of democracy - equality, justice and fraternity.

The literal meaning of the word Dalit is broken or shattered in Sanskrit and Hindi. The term is mostly used for the ethnic groups in India that have been kept depressed by subjecting them to untouchability. Dalit were excluded from four-fold Varna system of Hinduism and were seen as forming a fifth Varna. Dalits now profess various religious beliefs, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Shikhism, Christianity and Islam. The term Dalit was in use as a translation for the British Raj census classification of Depressed Classes prior to 1935. Dalit literature forms an important and distinct part of Indian literature. Dalit literature emerged in the 1960s in the Marathi language, and it soon appeared in the Hindi, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil languages, through narratives such as poems, short stories, and autobiographies, which stood out due to their stark portrayal of reality and the Dalit political scene.

Dalit literature denounced the then-prevailing portrayal of life by mainstream Indian literature, which lacked mention of the abject poverty-stricken lifestyle of Dalits and the oppression that Dalits experienced at the hands of higher castes. Arjun Dangle has defined Dalit literature as "Dalit literature is one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchbility in Inda. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principal of negativity, rebellion and loyalty revolutionary". Most of the marginalized groups all over the world have a similar system of oppression, but the titles are different as per the class and class divide. In India it was under the pretext of the caste and in Western world, it was under the name of race. Inequality is the main source of this marginality which leads to insecurity, injustice and exploitation. Marginalized sections were always on the periphery and distanced from the power centers. People who have been deprived of identities through their writing they have been trying to find their identity. Naturally, autobiographies form is an important component. Since the 1970s a considerable number of Dalit poets and writers have been producing poems, short stories and autobiographies dealing with the theme of caste oppression, question of identity, poverty, untouchability and revolution. They are using traditionally denied weapon of literacy and exposing the conditions under which they have survived. Dalit literature questioned the mainstream literature which they identified Hindu literature and challenge this hegemony.

Dalit autobiographies and its significant move in terms of reconstructing Dalit political history through memories of struggle and experience of caste discrimination amongst Dalits, it is women who face the worst kind of violence. They are gendered, sexualized and treated as both polluted and sexually available for the men of the dominant caste under the disguise of religious sanctions. Dalit women face patriarchy at home and the burden of patriarchy with caste outside. Neither the Dalit movement nor the women's movement in India opened up and accepted the issues of Dalit women.

In the 1980s and 1990s Dalit women claimed their issues and their own movement, the Dalit women's movement to fight patriarchy outside and within Dalit households. The movement marked their separate identity outside the unitary category of women and Dalit and their presence in the political sphere. Dalit women's autobiographies are opening up and laying bare the issues that remained close to their hearts. Sharmila Rege calls autobiographies of Dalit

women as testimonies. It also emphasizes their faith in justice and transformation in society in the conditions of Dalits and the caste system.

The aim of the present research is to explore feminist voices in the select Dalit autobiographies. The researcher has selected the following autobiographies of Dalit women: Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*, Bama's *Karukku* and *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* by Viramma, Jean-Luc Racine and Josaine Racine. It is an in-depth study of Dalit women who are doubly suffered. The select autobiographies show the struggle of Dalit women and their opposition to the discrimination, exploitation and injustice. They bitterly criticized the caste hegemony in Indian society.

In the work *The Prisons We Broke*, Baby Kamble protested against inhuman conditions which have been subjected to Dalit. It focuses on awareness that makes differences socially, culturally, economically, identity and religion etc. She describes the physical and psychological violence women have to undergo in both the public and private sphere. She demonstrates how caste and patriarchy converge to exploitative practices against women. In the work *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*, Urmila Pawar focuses on recoding woman's discovery of selfhood and assertion of identity. In *Karukku*, we find a sharp edged weapon is used by the author to cut the weeds of untouchbility and patriarchy which have thickly grown over the centuries in the ancient land. In *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable*, Viramma rejected the discrimination, exploitation, oppression and sufferings. She describes the misery of Pariah woman through this autobiography.

We can get a clear picture of the Indian society and the place of Dalit woman in the Indian society. All the select autobiographies are written by women, it is said a woman can understand woman's problems. The proposed research studies the select autobiographies by applying feminist approach.

Statement of the Problem:

The present proposed research titled "FEMINIST VOICES IN DALIT LITERATURE: THE STUDY OF SELECT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES". It studies the feminist voices in the select autobiographies. The present research highlights women's marginalization, sufferings and their

struggle for self. It also focuses how Dalit women doubly suffer for being Dalit and woman. It illustrates Dalit woman's experiences which are different from that of upper caste woman in Indian context.

Review of Literature:

The review of literature provides a detailed literary study in the field of relevant subject. It includes the study of select Dalit autobiographies. Various researchers work in the field of Dalit autobiography. There are several secondary sources available in the field of relevant study. J.H. Hutton's Caste in India (1969) gives critical study and examines the origin of caste system in Indian society. It also gives a detailed account of the stratification and determination of the status of particular caste. Raj Kumar's Dalit Literature and Criticism (2019), is an attempt to write and develop a critical literary history and theory of Dalit literature. The book grapples with several questions and issues that are keys to understanding Dalit voices in literature. Sharankumar Limbale's Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit literature is translated from Marathi into English by Alok Mukharjee. It focuses on distinction of Dalit literature and describes the impact of Ambedkarism, Marxism and relation between Afro-American and Dalit literature. Trilok Sharma's Dalit Women: Issues and Perspectives (2011), describes place of women in the social, economical and cultural factors.

Aims and Objectives of Research:

The aims and objectives of proposed research are as follows:

1. To investigate Dalit women's status in Indian society.
2. To analyze Dalit women's subjugation, oppression and discrimination.
3. To study the harassment of Dalit women by the caste people.
4. To analyze the connection of caste and gender in the life of Dalit women.
5. To understand the marginalized identity of Dalit women.
6. To appreciate resistance of Dalit women to the existing institutions and norms of society.

Hypotheses:

The present research focuses on the following hypotheses:

1. The study assumes that the Indian society has been divided on the basis of caste.
2. Women are always considered as an object, polluted and inferior to men.

3. Dalit women are victims of patriarchal domination by the hands of upper caste men and women.
4. Dalit women are exploited physically as well as psychologically.
6. Caste discrimination and patriarchal tendencies are the major obstacles in the life of Dalit woman.
7. Feminist voices in the select autobiographies highlights their rejection to injustice, inequality and caste hierarchy.

Research Methodology:

The present research is a study of feminist voices in select Dalit autobiographies. It uses textual descriptive method of analysis. Therefore, the researcher will use the primary and secondary sources.

The research method to be adopted will be followed in the critical study of literature or criticism. In short, it will be one of descriptive, exploratory, and interpretative nature. The study material will comprise the texts, questionnaires, and personal interviews of the scholars related to the concerned field.

Scope and Limitation:

The scope of present purpose research study is to investigate feminist voices in Dalit literature with the special reference to the select autobiographies. The proposed research focused on Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*, Bama's *Karukku* and *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable by Viramma*, Jean-Luc Racine and Josaine Racine. The These autobiographies expressed the condition of their individual life along with the situation of their own communities. They presented their sufferings, caste discrimination, the secondary place of woman in a family, humiliation, subjugation, exploitation at various levels etc. The limitation of this proposed research is all other Dalit autobiographies are excluded from the research. The research mainly focuses on the feminist voices which are presented in select autobiographies of Dalit. Dalit feminism is associated with the caste factor which was neglected by upper caste women in Indian context.

The Significance of the Study:

The proposed research focuses on feminist voices in Dalit women's select autobiographies. The main significance of this research is to underline Dalit women's condition

in Indian society and their struggle for identity. It also aims to illustrate how they raise their voices against caste discrimination, injustice, inequality, exploitation and patriarchal domination. Women are victimized by male constructed society. This research is an attempt to study Dalit women's issues in a broad way. It highlights how Dalit women have been kept aside from the main stream of development. They face exploitation, humiliation and ill treatment from every walk of life. They are suppressed economically, socially, politically and culturally in Indian society for centuries. The proposed research is an attempt to create awareness among readers about the oppressed section of our society. It will help to reconstruct the healthy society based on the foundation of liberty, fraternity, equality and social justice.

Tentative Chapter Scheme:

The present research is divided into following five tentative chapters.

1 Introduction
2. Feminist voices in Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*
3. Feminist voices in Bama's *Karukku* and *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable by Viramma,* Jean-Luc Racine and Josaine Racine.
4. A comparative study of feminist voices in select Dalit autobiographies of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu
5. Conclusion

Note : The chapter scheme of the present proposed research is tentative and subject to any later modification recommended by the supervision

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Researcher

More Roshankumar Vitthalrao
M.A.English, NET, CTE,
Diploma in French.

Research Supervisor

Dr. Shailaja B. Wadikar
Professor of English
School of Language, Literature and
Culture Studies
S.R.T.M.University, Nanded- 431606.